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Organized Crime and Places

Edward R. Kleemans

1. Introduction

Environmental criminology has produced major theoretical and empirical progress regarding the explanation and prevention of specific types of crime, particularly opportunistic street-level crime. The primary focus on these types of crime can be explained by the fact that the emergence of environmental criminology in the 1970s and 1980s coincided with pressing urban crime problems, including car crime, robbery, and burglary, in many Western, industrialized countries. Only later on, ideas from environmental criminology and situational crime prevention theory were transplanted to other, more serious types of “organized crimes,” often requiring a higher degree of social organization (e.g., Cornish and Clarke 2002; Van de Bunt and Van der Schoot 2003; Levi and Maguire 2004; Van der Schoot 2006; Bouloukos, Farrell, and Laycock 2003; Bullock, Clarke, and Tilley 2010; Von Lampe 2011; Kleemans, Soudijn, and Weenink 2012; Kleemans and Soudijn 2017).

Organized crime, however, is a highly contested concept (see Paoli and Vander Beken 2014). In an overview of theoretical perspectives on organized crime, Kleemans (2014) made a

distinction between three types of organized crime and three lines of research: racketeering, transit crime, and the local provision of illegal goods and services. The following sections (37.2, 37.3, and 37.4) go briefly into these three types of organized crime and the significance of place. Furthermore, the role of places and the (built) environment for organized crime is discussed (Section 37.5). The main message is that place has a different meaning for these three types of organized crime and raises several theoretical challenges. As these types of organized crime often require a higher degree of social organization than opportunistic street-level crime, Section 37.6 elaborates on two theoretical concepts that should be included in the study of organized crime and place: social opportunity structure and offender convergence settings. Without including these concepts, researchers run the risk of missing the main driving mechanisms behind the emergence and activities of criminal networks at specific places. Furthermore, the full potential of environmental criminology can only be realized if “place” is conceptualized in a different way and on a higher level than a specific point in space where an offender meets a target.

2. Racketeering

Absence of the state and/or state legitimacy is an important condition for certain forms of organized crime. Before the emergence of the major transnational drug markets that are so salient for organized crime groups today, organized crime groups already made profits in peasant societies such as Sicily in the late nineteenth century, by controlling the territory and acting as an “alternative government.” Other historical examples include the Hong Kong triads, the Russian mafia, and the Japanese yakuza (for a review, see Varese 2011; Kleemans 2015). Forms of “racketeering,” illicit activities on legal markets, can also be distinguished by focusing on Italian-American Mafia families in New York, exploiting dominant positions in the building

sector, the waste disposal industry, the Fulton fish market, the labor unions, the harbor, et cetera (e.g., Jacobs 1999). The basic idea is that organized crime groups gain control over certain regions or economic sectors and act as “alternative government.” Traditionally, the state is supposed to protect citizens, businesses, property rights, and business transactions through enforcement and is able to collect taxes for this common goal. If strong and legitimate state control is absent, organized crime groups are able to make profits by taking over these two traditional state monopolies (the monopoly of violence and taxation). Basically, control is exercised through (threats of) violence, and local productive activities are “taxed” by asking for protection money, putting people on the paying list, asking higher prices, or forcing buyers to accept and pay for certain goods and services. These profits, from “organizing” competition and cartel formation to outright extortion, are made possible through a power structure related to people, businesses, and politics (see, for a review, Varese 2014).

If we focus on the concept of place, for these types of criminal activities (racketeering), place actually means “territory,” including the control over people, activities, and resources. This control is based on social relations and economic and political power relationships. Therefore, theoretical explanations for the emergence and endurance of organized crime groups engaged in these activities often relate to state formation and borrow from theories from political science (e.g., public choice) and economics (monopoly, cartel formation) (for a review, see, e.g., Von Lampe 2006). In modern Western societies, we are used to the idea that the control over territories is in the hands of “strong states,” but these historical examples show that in many other countries and other periods of history, organized crime phenomena are often accompanied by the absence of a strong and/or legitimate state, “failed states,” or evaporating state control, such as in the case of the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s and 1990s.

Protection theory is often used to explain the emergence and endurance of criminal organizations, such as Mafia control in Sicily (Varese 2014). A specific interpretation by Gambetta (1993) is that organized crime groups actually render a “service” by selling private protection that the state cannot guarantee. Gambetta argues that Mafia groups respond to a demand for private protection: the Mafia actually is a specific economic enterprise that produces, promotes, and sells private protection and protects property rights and economic transactions, both legal and illegal. Paoli (2003) does not agree with this interpretation and views Mafia groups as multifunctional organizations, founded on premodern status and fraternization contracts. Mafia groups, in her opinion, have been used for a variety of goals and to accomplish a variety of functions. Both authors agree, however, on the “political” dimension of these organized crime groups: the power structure of these groups facilitates a variety of illicit activities on legal markets. Furthermore, they draw attention to the tacit or explicit support of the population and important economic and political actors. Whereas Gambetta favors a more “benevolent” interpretation (Mafia groups providing a service), Paoli traces Mafia power positions back to culture, history, and politics, and clearly interprets Mafia control as a “social bad” (yet hard to get rid of, as it also serves powerful interests).

In my view, one of the strong aspects of protection theory is that it interprets place on a higher level: as control over a territory, normally in the hands of a strong, legitimate state. This means that in the absence of a strong, legitimate state, organized crime groups can take over the control of territories and sectors and neutralize formal and informal social control. Or even worse: refocus informal social control and guardianship from preventing to promoting illicit activities. Organized crime research shows that Mafia control can relate to regions and business sectors or to smaller villages or neighborhoods, but varies and is not evenly spread (for

examples, see, e.g., Varese 2014; Bruinsma 2015). In all cases, however, formal and informal social control serves the power structure promoting illicit activities instead of preventing them.

An interesting recent example relates to worldwide opium production. Unlike producing coca leaves (which requires quite specific conditions), opium can be produced in many areas all over the world. Nevertheless, opium production is geographically highly concentrated in only a few countries, characterized to a large extent by weak states and “lax law enforcement” (Paoli, Greenfield, and Reuter 2009). Being left alone by the government and by law enforcement, therefore, is an important prerequisite for the emergence and endurance of organized crime groups and related activities. In some cases, organized crime groups take over state control and serve as an “alternative government,” but also in other cases a focus on power structures (and “governance”) in territories and economic sectors might help explain the opportunities for organized crime groups and the limitations of formal and informal control and guardianship.

Compared to the discussion about opportunistic street-level crime, the dominant focus of contemporary environmental criminology, three things are different. First, place is interpreted as “territory” and goes beyond a specific point in space where an offender meets a target. Second, control by Mafia groups and the absence of government control and law enforcement are the main issues. Third, the idea of guardianship and informal and formal control is reversed: the power structure facilitates illicit activities instead of preventing them.

3. Transit Crime

Mafia control is an interesting theoretical topic, and there are clear empirical examples of Mafia control in particular countries in particular periods in history (see for a review, e.g., Varese 2014). However, the empirical reality in many modern Western industrialized countries is that

organized crime as Mafia control is the exception rather than the rule.¹ In terms of economic profits, “transit crime” gives a much better description of the activities of organized crime groups in many Western European countries: criminal groups are primarily involved in illegal international trade, using the same opportunity structure that facilitates legal activities (Kleemans 2007, p. 176). In a review of organized crime in the Netherlands, a prime example of a transit economy, Kleemans (2007) argues that the major business of organized crime groups boils down to international smuggling activities: drug trafficking, smuggling illegal immigrants, human trafficking for sexual exploitation, arms trafficking, trafficking in stolen vehicles, and other transnational illegal activities, such as money laundering and evasion of taxes (e.g., cigarette smuggling, value-added tax fraud, and European Community fraud).

The concept of “transit crime,” as opposed to racketeering and Mafia control, is very relevant to the study of organized crime and environmental criminology. It refocuses attention from “place” to “borders”: links between places as well as between people living in different countries. It is not the coca farmer in Colombia who earns most of the illicit profits, but the highest profits are made by the people who are able to import cocaine into the major consumer markets in the United States and Western Europe (Reuter 2014). An important finding of organized crime research relates to brokerage. Because transnational trafficking activities often involve high potential financial gains as well as high risks (due to seizures, arrests, and rip-offs), social ties play a crucial role in the functioning of criminal networks (Kleemans and Van de Bunt 1999). However, social ties are clustered and related to social and geographical proximity. This means that social networks contain “structural holes” (Burt 2005), particularly between different countries, different ethnic groups, and the underworld and the licit world. As few people can

¹ Campana (2011) describes how Mafia groups may change their modus operandi across territories and different contexts: being involved in protection rackets in their territory of origin, while behaving just like any other actor in other places.

bridge these structural holes and transnational criminal activities require a high level of trust, offenders who can bridge these structural holes have all kinds of strategic opportunities to make a profit: They are the ones who make the connections between networks that would otherwise have remained apart. Because trust is so important, these connections are often based on family ties or other strong social bonds (Kleemans 2007, pp. 179–180).

Due to the importance of trust and the relatively high level of social organization that is required for transnational criminal activities, the study of organized crime cannot neglect the structure of social ties facilitating these activities. A good example is the prime position of the Netherlands as a transit country for drugs in Europe. On the one hand, this can be explained by the transit character of the Dutch economy and its excellent facilities, including harbors in Rotterdam and Antwerp (Belgium) and a large transit airport (see below). On the other hand, an important explanatory factor relates to social ties created by migration: the major immigrant groups in the 1960s and 1970s originated from drug-producing or exporting countries such as Suriname, the former Netherlands Antilles, Morocco, and Turkey (Fijnaut et al. 1998, pp. 83–87). This created social and economic links to cocaine-exporting countries (Southern America), cannabis-exporting countries (Morocco), and transit countries for heroin (Turkey). This “social” aspect of a country’s opportunity structure for transnational illegal activities is also visible in migrant smuggling. Human smugglers have often been smuggled themselves and have relationships with destination countries as well as with countries of origin, whereas smuggled migrants want to migrate to countries where family and/or larger communities are present.

Opportunities for transit crime, therefore, have both social and more physical aspects. The social opportunity structure relates to links between people: criminal organizations or criminal networks linking specific persons in different countries. Without such links and such

social organization, the transnational criminal activities are difficult to execute, whereas existing links may foster new streams of illegal goods and people. When researchers fail to take into account existing social ties and existing criminal networks, explanations for transnational criminal activities run the risk of only highlighting comparative advantages and opportunities that are never fully realized, because the social ties between people who would have to realize this potential have never been there in the first place.

Research on “borders” and “border crossing” (instead of place and the journey to crime) may also focus on the licit opportunity structure. An interesting early example is the comparison of drug prices in several European countries by Farrell (1998), concluding that (low) drug prices are closely related to licit transportation flows through certain logistical nodes in Europe.

This brings us also to the point that crossing borders and evading customs and other controlling agencies have physical, social, and economic aspects. Some people are allowed to cross borders without restrictions, whereas other people are more intensively checked when crossing borders. The same applies to particular economic goods being transited from one country to another. The modus operandi of smugglers, regardless of whether we are talking about people, drugs, or other goods, is closely related to the legal possibilities of crossing borders, including loopholes. Drugs are often smuggled alongside licit cargo (without being noticed) or in cargo that is difficult to check, or where checks are very labor intensive or economically infeasible (e.g., fresh goods that have to be moved quickly such as fruit, meat, fish, flowers, et cetera). Similarly, people smuggling often involves “regular channels”: entering as a legal citizen (using false documents), (fake) marriage, visas for students, scholars, or tourists, business invitations, and so on (for a review, see, e.g., Zhang 2007).

The parallel with routine activity theory stands out, as illicit activity feeds off licit activities and the opportunity structure that is created by licit activities and licit actors. Empirical research could take into account findings from environmental criminology and focus on transnational flows and the connections between particular countries. Furthermore, particular techniques (such as graph theory) could also be used when analyzing these new issues (similar to the analysis of street networks by using graph theory). In this respect, an important missing link is empirical research into central logistical nodes such as airports and harbors. Street segments and “pockets of crime” have been investigated in great detail, but important logistical nodes such as airports and harbors have largely been neglected by criminologists. This is problematic, as border crossing takes on many forms: at airports, passengers, luggage, cargo, catering, waste, and facilitating personnel goes into and out of “landside” and “airside” zones on a massive scale and on a daily basis, but empirical criminological research into these processes and accompanying security problems is largely nonexistent. Furthermore, government agencies such as customs and border police are relatively small players in a field consisting of many private companies and private security companies. This makes central logistical nodes such as airports and harbors very interesting new empirical themes for environmental criminology.

For situational crime prevention, transit crime creates three types of problems (Kleemans, Soudijn, and Weenink 2010, pp. 31–32). First many transit crime problems are “hidden” problems: If flows of passengers, luggage, or cargo are not checked systematically, smuggling flows go unnoticed or may be disregarded as a minor problem. Second, there is often a difference between the countries that would have to take security measures and the countries suffering the consequences. Exporting countries and transit countries typically are well positioned to play a crucial role in preventing smuggling, but often have a much smaller interest in preventing these

activities than the receiving countries (of, e.g., smuggled passengers and illegal goods). The very nature of illegal cross-border activities thus creates political tensions between different countries with different interests. Finally, there is the difficult trade-off between security interests and economic interests. A free flow of goods and people serves economic interests, and balancing these interests with adequate border controls is a very real problem for open Western economies. At airports and in harbors, this difficult trade-off is aggravated by the fact that private companies and private security companies reign supreme in these logistical nodes, creating problems of collective action, coordination, or outright defection (as strict controls, except for, e.g., explosives, involve high costs and low benefits for some private partners).

4. Local Markets of Illegal Goods and Services

Local markets of illegal goods and services have been studied intensively by various scholars, as access to these types of markets is easier than getting access to detailed information on transnational criminal activities. A landmark study is Reuter's analysis of specific local illegal markets such as gambling, numbers, and loansharking (Reuter 1983). In his book *Disorganized Crime*, Reuter argues that most criminal enterprises will be small and ephemeral, as offenders have to deal with various constraints of illegality: illegal activities have to be concealed, people can be arrested, and assets can be seized at any time.

Later studies often focused on local drug markets (for recent examples see, e.g., Bernasco and Jacques 2015; Piza and Sytsma 2016),² with a strong focus on "open air" drug markets. In many Western European countries, specific recent ethnic immigrant groups dominate the trade in open-air drug markets, whereas native offenders are more prevalent in other major sectors of the

² Because of space limits, I do not go into the study of street and window prostitution. For a review of research into e.g., the social ecology of Red-Light Districts, see Weitzer (2014), and for a review of criminogenic aspects and relationships with organized crime, see Kleemans and Huisman (2015).

drugs market, most notably those for cannabis and synthetic drugs, including production, importation, and exportation, and indoor drug markets (Paoli and Reuter 2008). However, the major focus of criminological research is on visible and accessible open-air drug markets and street dealing.

Seminal work on the geographic analysis of illegal drug markets has been done by Eck (1995), Rengert et al. (2000), and Rengert, Ratcliffe, and Chakravorty (2005). Many studies reflect theoretical notions spelled out by John Eck (1995) in his general model of the geography of illicit retail marketplaces. The basic idea is that sellers and buyers of illicit goods and services have to find ways to meet each other. One strategy is to use social networks, by selling only to people you know or to related people being introduced through social networks. This is relatively safe but restricts the number of potential customers. A different, more risky strategy is to sell to strangers, but meeting and trading in a safe way with strangers is a complicated task. Eck (1995, pp. 74–76) describes three problems. First, sellers and buyers cannot rely on a network for communication, so they have to use routine activities and meet in places in which both already conduct licit routine activities. Therefore, these places

will be located along major thoroughfares and at nodes of major activities, such as shopping centers, places of employment, recreation areas or schools. In short, illicit retail market areas where stranger-to-stranger selling takes place are likely to be near where people naturally concentrate. (Eck 1995, p. 75)

Second, security is a major problem, as strangers have to identify each other as potential buyers and sellers and face difficulties identifying and locating each other. Third, they often need the help of place managers to turn a blind eye, tolerate, or facilitate their behavior. According to Eck, this leads to four geographical characteristics: high place attachment, the involvement of place

managers, distribution along arterial routes and near nodes of high licit activities, and high density of the illicit marketplace (as they can serve many people).

In a recent study, Bernasco and Jacques (2015) add two important concepts from recent literature on retail geography: multipurpose shopping and comparison shopping. Multipurpose shopping means that customers' trips often serve multiple purposes. Comparison shopping refers to the finding that customers often want to compare multiple retailers, which means that retailers often locate in the proximity of competitors. The empirical study provides evidence that dealers go to places where the likelihood of successfully soliciting customers is high, but no evidence is found that they avoid places with informal and formal social control.

Piza and Sytsma (2016, pp. 40–42) explore the defensive actions of drug sellers in open-air markets: the use of partners in drug transactions (co-offenders, lookouts, or stashers of drugs or money), particular transactional mediation schemes (to obscure the occurrence of the transaction), conducting different phases of the transaction at different places, the use of stash spots (for drugs, guns, or money), and raising or slowing down the speed at which transactions occur. In the empirical study, dealers mainly turn out to work alone (90% of all transactions) and only involve partners (mostly runners) during the evening. Many defensive actions are related to geographic settings (commercial versus mixed residential settings) and time of day (daytime versus evening), but transactions were most often observed to occur immediately and lacked any mobility by the participants. Virtually no transactional schemes and stashes were used: sellers often held the drugs in an easily accessible place on their person (particularly when operating in a commercial setting) and in a minority of transactions they used an off-person stash (particularly in mixed residential settings).

All in all, the empirical study, similar to other studies, largely focuses on transactions on the spot between a seller and a buyer. It is important to note that such lower-level drug distribution by drug sellers is often studied, but in many countries falls outside of the official definitions of organized crime (see for a review, e.g., Paoli and Vander Beken 2014). Many definitions require cooperation between two, three, or more offenders over a prolonged period as well as criminal activities with substantial social harm (often meaning transnational drug trafficking and medium-level distribution of drugs instead of retail distribution by individual sellers). That means that most of the empirical work that has been done by researchers from the field of environmental criminology (i.e., on the geography of drug dealing) would not qualify in many countries as research into organized crime. However, a lot can be learned from these studies regarding criminal activities (rather than criminal cooperation).

5. Places and the Role of the (Built) Environment

MacDonald (2015) reviews the literature on the impact of housing and the built environment on crime. It is striking that the reviewed studies mainly focus on predatory crime and public nuisance and that organized crime is largely absent, except for lower-level drug dealing. This is not because organized crime activities do not depend on the built environment. For cannabis cultivation, for example, offenders need property (attics, cellars, sheds, [rented] commercial properties) to grow, harvest, dry, and parcel out cannabis; sellers of cuttings; wholesale cannabis buyers; and service providers such as electricians or “grow room builders” (Spapens, Van de Bunt, and Rastovac 2007; Decorte, Potter, and Bouchard 2011). The physical and social environment is critical for the successful operation of these illicit activities.

In a review of the importance of the environment for organized crime activities such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering, and various forms of

organized fraud, Kruisbergen, Van de Bunt, and Kleemans (2012, pp. 81–228) describe extensively how the environment facilitates organized crime and how offenders depend on facilitating environments. For each type of criminal activity, logistical requirements can be formulated, and how the environment enables criminal collaboration and criminal activities can be described.

Two things stand out compared to more traditional topics in environmental criminology. First, the facilitating environment comprises physical, social, economic, and even political factors. All these factors go beyond the individual rational actor. Social relationships with other persons are very important for access to co-offenders, lawyers, notaries public, financial advisors, employees of airports, harbors, or government agencies. Furthermore, legal entities and companies are important for combining legal and illegal activities or for getting access to other companies. Offender behavior in organized crime does not only naturally involve co-offending, but also combines social relationships with the opportunities created by institutional arrangements (legal entities and companies). Finally, whole subcultural or ethnic communities or economic sectors may be more or less supportive for carrying out certain illicit activities. This is important, as organized crime activities often involve prolonged co-operation in criminal activities that can be noticed by law enforcement and the immediate social environment. Shielding activities from formal and informal social control, therefore, is the heart of the matter. In environmental criminology, the wider social, economic, and sometimes political aspects of the physical environment are often disregarded.³ When studying organized crime, it is unwise to disregard these salient factors.

³ For certain types of crime and offender behavior this is not problematic. Furthermore, studies on criminogenic environments and ‘gentrification’ often include these aspects.

Second, many organized crime activities have a “glocal” character (Hobbs 1998). Illicit activities are both transnational in character and locally rooted in cities, neighborhoods, and economic sectors. Offenders are located in neighborhoods and economic sectors, search for suitable co-offenders, organize their activities, and invest their illicit proceeds in specific locations and economic activities. It is striking that Italian Mafia groups do not invest in sectors with the highest economic profitability. On the contrary, control of the territory seems to explain their investment behavior better than economic factors (Savona 2015). Furthermore, offenders in Dutch organized crime cases primarily invest in their countries of origin and economic sectors familiar to them: proximity explains their investment behavior better than power or profit motives (Kruisbergen, Kleemans, and Kouwenberg 2015). Although the “glocal” character of organized crime is straightforward, research often focuses either on the transnational aspects of organized crime (disregarding the concentration of co-offenders and illegal activities in particular places) or on the lower end of local distribution markets of illegal goods and services.

6. Theoretical Progress on Organized Crime and Places

Environmental criminology has a lot to offer for the study of organized crime and places. However, the full potential of environmental criminology can only be realized if “place” is conceptualized in a different way and on a higher level than a specific point in space where an offender meets a target. Also for predatory crime, much progress has been made by including empirical research into offender behavior (e.g., the journey to crime and offender decision-making processes), the distribution in space of potential offenders (including the influence of housing), and routine activities of offenders and victims (influencing the interactions of motivated offenders and suitable targets in space and time in the absence of capable guardians). For organized crime, we need to go one step further and take co-offending seriously. As

organized crime often requires a higher degree of social organization than opportunistic street-level crime, I will elaborate on two theoretical concepts that should be included in the study of organized crime and place: social opportunity structure and offender convergence settings.

Without including these concepts, researchers run the risk of missing the main driving mechanisms behind the emergence and activities of criminal networks at specific places.

6.1 Social Opportunity Structure

For certain types of predatory crime, such as burglary, robbery, or theft, opportunities are ubiquitous and open to everyone. For organized crime, and particularly transnational criminal activities, opportunities are only there for individuals with the right connections who are able to organize successful cooperation—often over a longer period of time—to seize these opportunities. For explaining organized crime, therefore, it is important to focus not only on the physical opportunity structure, but also on the social opportunity structure, a concept coined by Kleemans and De Poot (2008) and defined as “social ties providing access to profitable criminal activities” (p. 75). Social opportunity structure can not only explain the development of individual criminal careers but also be combined with topics such as crime script analysis and the connection between crime and place. The fact that people operate within criminal networks means that the continuity and flexibility in the execution of criminal activities are enhanced. Depending on their criminal network contacts, offenders have access to co-offenders and alternative ways to organize specific criminal activities. Morselli and Roy (2008) combine this idea with crime script analysis and point out that nodes in networks create permutations to crime scripts, which means that there are alternative ways of carrying out specific criminal activities. Conversely, isolated offenders will never be able to organize these criminal activities.

For crime and place, regardless whether we are talking about racketeering, transit crime, or local markets of illegal goods and services, it is important to focus also on *the geographical structure of criminal networks and criminal ties*. For racketeering, it is important that a strong, geographically isolated social network is already there and that legitimate government and law enforcement are absent, creating the opportunity for criminals to build a power structure, based on social contacts, economic interests, and political interests. The best situation to achieve this is relative isolation, in a social, economic, and political sense. In his book *Mafias on the Move*, Varese (2011) describes situations conducive to Mafia control, for example, a small, isolated village with a relatively isolated and monoculture economy, versus situations in which Mafia control fails, for example, a much larger city in which various economic actors operate on interregional or international markets (having no interest in “protection” as well as many possibilities to evade Mafia control).

For transit crime, the social and economic links between particular countries are important, as criminal networks are built upon existing social relationships and criminal activities are facilitated by licit flows of goods and people between countries. It explains why most cocaine to Europe is shipped through Spain (with its historical social and economic links to South America) and the Netherlands (with its links to Suriname and the former Dutch Antilles as well as the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp [Belgium]). It also explains human smuggling routes, as states with social and economic bonds often ease travel and trade restrictions and create more opportunities for licit and illicit flows of goods and people. Important examples are travel options between (former) Communist countries such as China, Russia, and Eastern European countries, and changes in human smuggling and heroin-trafficking routes after the end

of the Cold War and the new membership of former Communist countries of the European Union.

Finally, for local markets of illegal goods and services, social ties are also important, if we focus on the connections between transnational criminal activities and the local infrastructure or distribution through social networks. For open-air drug markets, it seems less relevant or perhaps only for shielding activities from law enforcement, through good contacts with other dealers and place managers. However, for more elaborate structures, such as local cannabis cultivation and distribution, it is clear that social ties are also important for getting access to co-offenders, enablers, and different locations that are necessary for carrying out these criminal activities.

6.2 Offender Convergence Settings

For organized crime, existing social ties are very important, but not all necessary capabilities can be found in existing relationships, and for successful criminal activities, networks need to be expanded. Therefore, introductions by existing contacts to third parties are vital, and this draws attention to the places where offenders spend their social and professional life. Felson (2006) coined the term “offender convergence setting” and explained it with the example of the tough bar where offenders can meet potential co-offenders and which allows criminal cooperation to persist even when the particular persons vary. Such offender convergence settings enhance the durability of offender networks and create a source for new potential recruits (Felson 2006, pp. 97–99; Kleemans and Van de Bunt 2008).

For organized crime, we have to look beyond the tough bar and include several aspects of social life: meeting places in neighborhoods, nightlife, entertainment districts, and leisure

activities (e.g., shooting and motorcycle clubs). However, the idea of offender convergence settings can also be extended to professional life and work settings

There are different ways in which occupations may present opportunities for committing organized crime: first, through international contacts and travel movements. Contacts with other countries and other social groups provide ample opportunity to discover and act on certain opportunities for (transit) crime. Examples are occupations involving mobility, transport, and logistics. Second, individual freedom of movement and/or discretion is important. This explains the involvement of directors of (small) businesses, independent professionals, and, in some cases, individuals with relative autonomy in larger organizations, such as companies and banks. More trust and autonomy means more opportunity for abuse as well. Third, the social nature of certain occupations is important. Occupations in which people often meet with different people also present many opportunities for encounters with potential co-offenders (Kleemans and Van de Bunt 2008, p. 195).

Due to the thin line between licit and illicit activities, the concept of offender convergence settings should be extended from the tough bar (in which known criminals meet) to salient offender convergence settings in social and professional life. It is important to note that these settings need not only be “place based,” as they follow the logic of social relationships and shared activities. For transnational crime, it means that these settings often transcend borders (e.g., transnational licit activities and connected professional settings) or are connected to international logistical nodes such as airports and harbors. For more local aspects of organized crime, offender convergence settings may be “place based” and typically lack formal guardianship or even reverse the mechanisms of guardianship when criminal activities are protected rather than prevented. Examples described by Huisman and Jansen (2012) include

trailer camp communities and outlaw motorcycle gangs. In such areas and/or communities, it is easy to find co-offenders, use the “criminal infrastructure,” and shield criminal activities from the authorities.

7. Conclusion

This chapter described the connection between organized crime and places for three types of organized crime: racketeering, transit crime, and the local provision of illegal goods and services. Place turns out to have a different meaning for these three types of organized crime and raises several theoretical challenges. As these types of organized crime often require a higher degree of social organization than opportunistic street-level crime, two theoretical concepts should be included in the study of organized crime and place: social opportunity structure and offender convergence settings. Without including these concepts, researchers run the risk of missing the main driving mechanisms behind the emergence and activities of criminal networks at specific places. Furthermore, the full potential of environmental criminology can only be realized if “place” is conceptualized in a different way and on a higher level than a specific point in space where an offender meets a target.

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